Department of State TELEGRA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 8537

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM AR
SUBJ: VISIT TO WASHINGTON BY "MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO"

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. IN THE PAST MONTH A NUMBER OF THE "MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO" HAVE UNDERTAKEN NEW INITIATIVES, INCLUDING TRAVEL ABROAD, TO UNDERSCORE THEIR DEMANDS THAT THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF THE DISAPPEAREDS. FIVE ARGENTINE MOTHERS -- ANGELICA MIGNONE AND RENEE EPEBAUM, TRAVELING FROM OTTAWA, ARE BEING JOINED IN WASHINGTON BY ELIDA GALETTI, HEBE BONAFINI AND MARIA CERRUTI. IN WASHINGTON THE GROUP WILL SEEK TO MEET WITH GOVERNMENT, CONGRESSIONAL AND NGO LEADERS. THE GROUP EXPECTS TO BEGIN ITS WASHINGTON ACTIVITIES ON OCTOBER 26.
WE THOUGHT IT USEFUL TO SEND AT THIS TIME THE FOLLOWING SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES BY "THE MOTHERS". GENERALLY SPEAKING WE SENSE A HIGH LEVEL OF FRUSTRATION
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AS TIME PASSES AND THE LADIES RECEIVE NO INFORMATION

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PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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REGARDING THEIR DISAPPEARED CHILDREN. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. THE PLAZA MOTHERS HAVE UNDERTAKEN A NUMBER OF NEW INITIATIVES IN THE LAST MONTH. MOST IMPORTANT IS A VISIT TO WASHINGTON, NEW YORK AND OTTAWA, WHERE A GROUP OF FIVE MOTHERS PLAN TO MEET WITH GOVERNMENT, CONGRESSIONAL, UN, OAS, AND NGO LEADERS TO SEEK GREATER US AND CANADIAN SUPPORT ON THE QUESTION OF THE DISAPPEAREDS. ANGELICA MIGNONE AND RENEE EPELBAUM ARE REPORTED TO BE IN OTTAWA THIS WEEK. THEIR CANADIAN VISIT IS BEING ARRANGED BY THE TORONTO BASED INTER-CHURCH COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA. THESE TWO MOTHERS AND THREE OTHERS COMING FROM ARGENTINA -- ELIDA GALETTI, HEBE BONAFINA AND MARIA CERRUTI -- PLANNED TO MEET IN WASHINGTON ON OCTOBER 25. WOLA REPRESENTATIVE, SISTER JO MARIE GRIESGRABER, IS EXPECTED TO BE THE PRINCIPAL WASHINGTON CONTACT FOR THE GROUP. WE SUGGESTED THAT THE GROUP CONTACT BUMPUS (ARA/ECA), LISTER (ARA), AND COHEN (HA/HR) TO ARRANGE MEETINGS WITH ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS.

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A LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO THE MAJOR LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ARGENTINA HAS ALREADY BEGUN. IN A RELATED EFFORT, A LETTER WAS SENT ON OCTOBER 2 SIGNED BY 38 MOTHERS TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF BUENOS AIRES, CARDINAL ARAMBURU, STRONGLY DENOUNCING THE CARDINAL'S REFUSAL TO MENTION

THE DISAPPEARANCE QUESTION DURING HIS SERMON TO THE 600,000 LUJAN PILGRIMS. THE LETTER WENT ON TO ASSERT THAT THE MOTHERS HAD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT ARGENTINE CHURCH LEADERS PREFERRED CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE TEMPORAL POWERS AND ITS ADVANTAGES, INSTEAD OF "TESTIFYING TO THE TRUTH" AND "SERVING THE PERSECUTED AND SUFFERING." THE MOTHERS ARE CIRCULATING THE LETTER, WHICH IS THE FIRST PUBLIC ATTACK ON THE ARGENTINE CHURCH'S POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

3. THE MOTHERS' GROUP APPEARS TO BE GROWING IN STRENGTH

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HERE. THE THURSDAY AFTERNOON GATHERINGS IN THE PLAZA DE MAYO HAVE BEEN INCREASING IN NUMBERS. DEPENDING ON THE WEATHER, THERE ARE PRESENTLY BETWEEN 200 AND 300 WOMEN IN THE PLAZA EACH THURSDAY. A SPECIAL MOTHERS' DAY MASS ON OCTOBER 15 ANNOUNCED BY ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE LOCAL PRESS REPORTEDLY DREW 2,000 PERSONS TO A CHURCH IN DOWNTOWN BUENOS AIRES. AFTER THE MASS, A GROUP ESTIMATED AT OVER 1,000 WALKED IN PROCESSION TO THE PLAZA DE MAYO AND CIRCLED THE PLAZA SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE DISBANDING. EXCEPT FOR A POLICEMAN'S (UNSUCCESSFUL) REQUEST THAT ONE OF THE MOTHERS "ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY" FOR THE MASS AND THE MARCH, THERE WAS NO POLICE INTERFERENCE. THE MOTHERS TOLD E. EMBOFF THEY WERE VERY PLEASED WITH THE TURNOUT; HOWEVER OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVERS REGRETTED THAT THIS LARGE A DEMONSTRATION PASSED VIRTUALLY UNNOTICED THROUGH THE DESERTED SUNDAY STREETS OF CENTRAL BUENOS AIRES.

4. ANOTHER POINT WORTH NOTING IS THE DECISION OF THE MOTHERS TO ADOPT NEW VERBAL FORMULATION IN THEIR QUEST FOR INFORMATION. THEY ARE NOW USING THE WORD "DETENIDO" (DETAINEE) TO REFER TO THE MISSING AND ARE SPECIFICALLY REJECTING THE WORD "DESAPARECIDO" (DISAPPEARED) AS A "FALSE" DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM. ONE MOTHER SUMMED UP THE NEW CONCEPT BY STATING THAT
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"ALL OUR MISSING CHILDREN ARE DETAINEES. 'DESAPARECIDOS' REFERS MERELY TO DRAMAS WITHOUT SOLUTIONS."

5. THE MOTHERS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY OPTIMISTIC REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RETURN OF THE DISAPPEARED DUE TO A NUMBER OF REPORTS OF CLANDESTINE DETENTION FACILITIES CIRCULATING IN HUMAN RIGHTS CIRCLES HERE. MANY OF THESE REPORTS ARE ALLEGED TO

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DETAINEES. (COMMENT: THE EMBASSY IS ASSESSING THESE REPORTS IN A SEPARATE CABLE ON "UNOFFICIAL" DETENTION CENTERS. ALTHOUGH WE KNOW AND GOA OFFICIALS PRIVATELY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOME "DISAPPEAREDS" ARE HELD IN SUCH CENTERS ONE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE BIAS FAMILIES OF DISAPPEARED PERSONS HAVE TOWARD MAINTAINING THIS BELIEF.) END COMMENT.

6. IN ANOTHER RECENT INITIATIVE, ON OCTOBER 10, LETTERS FROM 189 OF THE PLAZA MOTHERS WERE PRESENTED TO THE EMBASSY FOR TRANSMITTAL TO PRESIDENT CARTER. THE LETTERS (WHICH ARE BEING POUCHED TO THE DEPARTMENT) CONTAIN INFORMATION REGARDING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF DISAPPEARANCES OF FAMILY MEMBERS AND REQUEST THE PRESIDENT'S HELP.

7. EMBASSY WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR PLAYBACK ON ACTIVITIES OF THE MOTHERS' GROUP IN OTTAWA, NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON.
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